SECTION SEVEN
EIGHT PAGES

THE NEW YORK HERALD

Music, Plays, Photoplays and Art Criticism

[COPYRIGHT, 1922, BY THE SUN-HERALD CORPORATION.]

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1922.

Gauze and Gewgaws of the Rialto

The Reviewing Stand

By ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT.

TUCKERED out, Frank Bacon died last week. He was a most gentle and friendly comedian, who, after long years of unrewarded trouping, was allowed a sweet-tasting triumph before his exit cue was given. The tale of "Lightnin'" and its unprecedented run at the Gaiety will be told for many seasons in the theater, but some of us will remember longer and with a fonder amusement the story of Bacon's adventures during the actors' strike three years ago and more. It was at the time when Times Square was seething with excitement, when the company from the Gaiety was junketing up and down Broadway bearing a banner that proclaimed, "'Lightnin' has struck," and when the resisting minority of stage notables was assembling to form what later became known as the Fidelity League. Into their meeting one afternoon ambled Bacon, mooning absently about among the players who had been tasting fame when he was a little known comedian adrift in the far West. He was hailed with joy, swept forward to the platform and called upon for a speech then and there. In the manner of *Lightnin' Bill* he puttered about his subject for a while, peering vaguely out over his spectacles and beaming on his fellow craftsmen. He told them how cruel a blow it was to him, after so many years, to have his first success snuffed out at the Gaiety by the walkout of the actors. After all, he himself was involved not merely as an actor but as a playwright. In his distress of mind and his uncertainty as to what he ought to do, he had gone to Ma.

"Well, Frank," she had said, and as he reported her advice his words came mildly but with devastating effect, "it'll be pretty hard to have to go back to hall bedrooms and cooking over the gas jet at our age. But, Lord, we've done it before and I guess we can do it again. I guess we want to stick by the boys and girls."

Biographical

READERS of these random Sabbath observations will sooner or later discover here an incorrigible curiosity about the people of the stage, a lively and unflagging interest in the playwrights and players themselves, a persistent questioning as to the inheritance and the adventures on earth of those who are astir in the theater. About this gossipy strain we have always felt a trifle sheepish, uneasily aware that it is infrequent in the higher and drier regions of dramatic criticism. We are, therefore, the more uplifted by being reminded that, if it be a streak of shoddy, there was just such a streak in the writings of the late James G. Huneker. Or so it is said in the new series of Mencken's "Prejudices." "I believe," observes the bouncing sage of Baltimore, "that it is almost literally true to say that he (Huneker) could never quite make up his mind about a new symphony until he had seen the composer's mistress, or at all events a good photograph of her." At the risk of seeming a little like Louisa Alcott shaking a reproving finger at Walt Whitman, we should like to add that, for our own part, we are quite as interested in getting some view of the composer's mother. That, at least, prepresents a constant in the problem.

* * *

We are especially disposed to pounce on any stray bit of biography that illuminates the handing down of the comedian's talent from generation to generation. There is such a striking continuity in the tales of show folks! As the matter-of-fact young swain in "The Romantic Age" observes cheerfully on the subject of breakfast, it does keep cropping up. Consider, for instance, "The Print of My Remembrance," the most interesting volume of theater memoirs we have read. One thinks of Augustus Thomas as the son of a doctor and himself a railroad man who turned playwright after much tinkering with amateur performances. But explore a little in this autobiography of his and back of him somewhere you will find a theater. It was the theater which his father, together with Ben de Bar and Tom Davey, established in '63, in the sixth year of the Augustan era. It was set up in New Orleans, where the Union troops were plaintively calling for entertainment much as the A. E. F. was later to call for Elsie Janis. So many stories of the American stage lead back through the years to that wartime playhouse! For instance, there was the lovely Matilda Heron. Thomas remembers her chiefly by his father's photograph of "an attractive young woman in a pancake hat, a short, smart basque and a wide expanse of crinoline." It is Matilda Heron's grandson, Gilbert Miller, who sits enthroned these days at the Empire Theater. And it was in New Orleans the winter after the troops had gone home and the theater had been closed that Davey's daughter was born, the red headed Marie Augusta, who, after a decorous interval, went on the stage and became Mrs. Fiske.

* * *

There are show folks, too, back of our new hero, that indefatigable and delightful two-legged entertainment, Joe Cook. Here was born into this world as Joseph Lopez, the son of a Spanish father and an Irish mother—troupers both, though the elder Lopez was also a painter. That Cook is half Spanish and half Irish you can tell from the tilt and cast of his features if you sit well forward in the auditorium and if some one has already told you. The younger Lopez, left an orphan and adopted by some Cooks of Evansville, Ind., reverted to his ancestral art in the summertime by going along with sundry county fairs as a wire walker. As soon as he had exhausted the public instruction afforded by Evansville he abandoned all thought of higher mathematics and made a beeline for vaudeville, where he proposed to become famous as a black face juggler. His first New York appearance was made embarrassingly early in the bill of a Sunday night concert at one of the roof gardens. He got the job on the strength of a photograph which showed him nonchalantly juggling seventeen balls at once, a sleight of hand feat made possible by earnest practice and the assistance of the photographer, who had blotted out the string on which the seventeen were strung as on a necklace. Young Cook opened the bill on which, later in the evening, was that other flower of the middle West—Baby Elsie. At the time Cook considered Miss Janis much overrated. She didn't juggle at all. Now he is getting pretty famous himself along Broadway, and it seems reasonably certain that before long some producer who has bought a carload of costumes and a lot of dull music will try to involve him in the proceedings and call the result a revue.

Glenn Hunter, who plays the title role in "Merton of the Movies" at the Cort.

The Week's Grist

OF the two comedies which the past week brought to town, "The Texas Nightingale" is the better worth seeing as matters stand. It is the most skillful and the most entertaining of the plays which Zoe Akins has written, a really brilliant dramatic portrait sketched with insight and wit and a growing gift for saying much in little. As a portrait it is superior to "Enter Madame," to which it bears considerable surface resemblance. The nightingale in question is just such another stormy, whirlwind prima donna as the *Della Robbia* of Varesi's comedy—as magnificent, as unswerving and as exhausting as Niagara. She is one of those spacious, dominant, glamourous women to whom, from Mary Stuart's day until our own, weak, second rate men have always adhered. In the Akins comedy you are vouchsafed glimpses of her at a time when she is heroically denying many of her more than forty years, alternately buffeting and caressing her exasperating son, casting a wistful backward glance or two in the direction of one of her former husbands, choking with emotion over her current love for a contemporary of her son's who is also a master violinist, the while she cooks a meal or two and attends to a few domestic trifles, such as the weight of her son's underwear and the progress of her suitor's dentistry. And the last you see of her, after an afternoon of storm and stress, she is squaring her shoulders and slamming off to the Metropolitan to sing *Brunhilde*. It is a delightful and engaging portrait of some one you would rather not live with much. The denizens of that slightly fabulous institution, the Metropolitan, will doubtless detect an original back of the impressionistic portrait Miss Akins has dashed off with so much relish. Except for the nice perfection of one Beth Varden in a trifling rôle, the cast assembled at the Empire is at no point as good a one as the play deserves. The central rôle was written for Jobyna Howland, who is no more than pretty good in meeting its exactions. After all, the Akins imagination leaped beyond the little task of theatrical dressmaking to which it had been set and gave birth to a rôle which calls for a player who can look like Ethel Barrymore and act like Mrs. Fiske. It must be admitted that actresses of that description do not precisely abound.

* * *

The other new play of the week was "The Lucky One," by A. A. Milne. This comedy has less sugar in it than any of his others and in it he plays a curious and, we, think, unprecedented trick on his audience. By many devices he lures his audience into an antipathy for his "lucky one." To *Gerald* have fallen all the good things. At school at Oxford, at home, at sports, at business, at love, *Gerald* is the favorite of the two brothers. He has the wit and the charm and the success. This is so rubbed in that a deep sympathy is begotten in behalf of his smouldering brother. Indeed, the susceptible playgoer has just given way to a sneaky rejoicing that the pitying girl has, after all, turned to poor *Bob* instead, when suddenly, in a flash of dramatic lightning, the two brothers stand face to face, revealed. And you find that of the two the real man was *Gerald* after all. The Guild was unlucky in its search for an actor to play *Gerald* but no actor could covert the rôle. It is one of those perilous things in the theater—a part that thunders in the index. The actor called upon to embody this paragon, over whom all the others rave incessantly, is in a position a little too much like that into which the hardy Phyllis Neilson Terry plunged herself some years ago when "Trilby" was revived. Here was the rôle of the woman with the voice of the ages—such a magically lovely voice that beside it Patti's paled and at the sound of it lifted in the simplest songs the heart melted. After which preamble on came Miss Terry and sang—a sweet, reedy, piping little voice that could not possibly live up to its advance notices.

Jeanne Eagels in "Rain," from a woodcut by George Illiam.

The Talk of Broadway

By FRANK VREELAND

THE problem of what Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., would do with the New Amsterdam roof has been one of the burning questions along the Rialto since prohibition sealed up the roof shows as tight and as dry as a drum. The conundrum can now be answered without further waiting. It appears that Ziegfeld, who said he would never again open a roof show there of his favorite type, is planning to turn the place into a legitimate theater, and with the Century and the Nora Bayes, the city will soon have three skyscraper theaters uplifting the drama.

Designers are already reported to be at work making estimates for converting it into a regular theater, and probably by next season New Yorkers will be ascending still higher in the scale in their effort to get close to art. The New Amsterdam roof can then make the claim that it has an attraction with the highest altitude in the city. It is likely that some arrangement will be made about having the shows up stairs and down start at different hours, in order to avoid any congestion in the lobby, which otherwise would show a tendency to get as heavily clogged up as a ball at Webster Hall.

It does not seem to be settled whether the balcony will be brought down toward the stage in the regular way, or left surrounding the auditorium on three sides as in a convention hall. A theater built in Chicago on the same plan as the New Amsterdam roof was converted into a regular playhouse and its three sided balcony left standing, without arousing any clamor from the multitude.

But one great mystery still is unsolved. What's to be done with the kitchen? This cost $60,000 to install for the restaurant, and Ziegfeld has left orders that it is to remain. Perhaps he intends it to be a memorial to the roof show days and the mad, glad days—or nights—before the war.

Ziegfeld has just engaged Eleanor Painter, the prima donna who left "The Lady in Ermine" at Atlantic City under circumstances which called for much publicity. She has been acquired for "The Cowboy Princess," another of those Viennese operettas, and since "The Lady in Ermine" was one such originally—and Miss Painter has appeared in this sort of entertainment for the last three years—she may feel she is fulfilling her destiny after all.

The piece has music by George Jarno, who wrote the score for "The Girl and the Kaiser," which was presented here before the war made such subjects taboo in the best circles. The libretto was furnished by Fritz Gruenbaum, Viennese writer, being drawn from a story by the Hungarian novelist Petofi.

Some dispute may arise as to whether Miss Painter, who arranged for her new engagement through M. S. Bentham, is still under contract to the Shuberts. From the offices of the latter comes word that she is, but Miss Painter declares she was engaged simply for the one show mentioned. Who will be the first to contradict a lady?

When A. L. Erlanger and the Shuberts first made their cooperative booking arrangement, to avoid conflicts in the smaller cities that would be disastrous in the present state of the road, it was emphasized by both sides that the interlocking booking arrangement would not extend to New York city. Up to a short time ago it was stated positively that the Shuberts and their allies would continue to play in Shubert houses in the metropolis and Erlanger and his group would continue in the Erlanger houses. Now, however, the booking of "Rain" by Sam H. Harris, hitherto affiliated with Erlanger in Maxine Elliott's Theater, a Shubert stronghold, indicates that the opening wedge has been made in the way of cooperative booking in Manhattan and that these formerly bitter rivals will henceforth be closely identified in the city that was of yore their biggest battleground. *Sic transit gloria belli!*

The theater seems to be in for a downpour of bootlegging plays, following in the wake of "The Bootleggers," which promises to expose everything the coming week. Paul Dickey has written a play called "The Rum Runners," which is a melodrama that threatens to let the truth be known about the Canadian border. This piece was slated to go into rehearsal some time this week end, and Dickey is making the production himself, in addition to backing it with his world of experience.

"A Clean Town," the latest work of the Nugents, which is to come to the Belmont Theater around December 4, guarantees to show up a small town where the Mayor is crooked and the hooch hounds are slippery. Doubtless there are many more plays of this type lurking in the bushes. Possibly when the grapevine grape trade begins to lag many bootleggers will turn playwright and cash in on their past.

Perhaps Eugene Walter may do his share toward exposing the Canadian border in two plays which he has smuggled back with him from across the line. Last May he went into the wilds of the Dominion, hiding in the underbrush 150 miles north of Montreal, the better to concoct plays. With him he took only his secretary, his trusty typewriter and his ready smile.

He roughed it through the summer, and, behold, he turned up a few weeks ago with two plays ready to lay at the feet of New York. A. H. Woods, it is reported, will do one piece and David Belasco will be the benevolent godfather of the other. Perhaps next season the author of "The Easiest Way" will again be rampant on the Manhattan stage after a long silence.

Montague Glass and Jules Eckert Goodman are reported to be writing another play, different from the "Potash and Perlmutter" type, for A. H. Woods, but with "Partners Again" doing so well and with every prospect of a warm welcome in Chicago, it is understood that Glass and Goodman are not hurrying the new work to pay any bills.

Grace Valentine recently had what can only be set down as a peculiar experience. A play was written for her several months ago by John Montague, who, by the way, composed in all its majesty "The Narrow Path," intended as a companion piece for "The Easiest Way" when the Walter play was herding them in years ago "The Narrow Path" was engulfed on the great white way in a few weeks.

Montague's latest play was called "Flapper, Inc.," and according to the author it dealt with a manicure girl who became acquainted with several wealthy men and induced them to capitalize her personality with a cash investment. In return for the money they donated to her—with the nicest, censor proof intentions, of course—she was to become gaudy as a peacock, exploit herself at a popular resort, bag a wealthy husband and pay a large percentage on the dollar.

This play was submitted to a manager, and in the course of a couple of months came back with the usual note that he could not find it in his heart to produce it at the present time. And then the author suddenly noticed that a play had been presented out of town with a theme that seemed to be as closely related to his as New York is to Brooklyn. Coincidences, it seems, will persist in happening.

Vincent Serrano is out of the cast of "At the End of the World," now deposited in Chicago. He departed after the premiere at Stamford, having kept up with the piece for just one night. Incidentally this play, which is localized in a lighthouse in South America, was seen here several months ago on the screen under the same name and as a production by Penryn Stanlaws, with Betty Compson as the woman who gave the men in the lighthouse the fidgets. This is another instance of the stage plucking fruit from the celluloid, though the piece was presented in Europe before taking to the screen here. "Sherlock Brown," Bayard Veiller's film comedy in which Bert Lytell appeared, is another similar instance, as the story goes that it will now be served before the footlights.

The annual report that Eddie Foy and the Foy family are to come out in a full-sized musical comedy blossoms forth again, showing increased strength despite its age. This time the show is given a definite name, "The Casey Girl," and its authorship is ascribed to Willard Mack, with music and lyrics by the eldest boy, Bryan Foy, who is now too big a lad to act with Father and the kids.

Charles Dillingham will probably bring over from England next spring "The Cabaret Girl," the reigning hit at the London Winter Garden, which Jerome Kern and Anne Caldwell wrote and put on last summer after they stole away from New York for a little rest. It will be the first Kern-Caldwell fabrication which did not see the light of day in this country first. The show will come here under an arrangement by Dillingham with Capt. J. A. E. Malone of Grossmith & Malone, who departs for England on December 4 with the English rights to "The Bunch and Judy" under his wing.

While the lease of William Harris, Jr., on the Ritz Theater has one more season to run, the house is reported to be already on the market for a possible tenant, which relieves somewhat the theater famine in New York.

William Fox will relinquish the Astor Theater at the end of this year, but it will not snap back into the spoken drama. A feature picture by another producer is to come to earth here on January 1 for an indefinite run.

William Elliott, former partner as a producer with F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest, is reported to have finished his first movie in Paris for a French photoplay company who were willing to stand for some American methods of directing. They are starring a Spanish actress, Raquel Mellar, who is said to be of the style of Cleo de Merode, whom all friends of the late King Leopold of Belgium will recall. Elliott has been acting in the picture, as well as bawling out the extras through a megaphone. He has taken the company to Algiers, the favorite stamping ground of French film companies whenever they want to stir up the dust of passion.

The office assistant stepped into the office of the theatrical manager, interrupting the latest Broadway story he was telling.

"The director for the new play," she reported, "has engaged Miss Blah for the part of the stenographer and for general understudy. He sent her to pick out a hat and a costume, and she chose an outfit that makes her look better than any one, even the leading lady. Is she to keep the costume?"

"Sure," said the manager. "She can't act worth a whoop. But let her look good, anyhow."

The "Forty-niners," who closed their initial offering at the Punch and Judy Theater abruptly last Saturday, are not expected to put on another bill, after having lived through the first one. This in spite of the fact that they are said to have enough skits submitted by eminent authors to fill a large sized barrel.

MY DEAR SIR:

BURTON GREEN.

To the Dramatic Editor:

Just a few words on the passing of our Burton Green. The first telegram of sympathy was from the widow of a famous editor, the second from a prize fighter whom he hadn't met in twenty years, and then they came until the Western Union waited until they had about twenty before sending their boy over with them. They were messages from millionaires and bootleggers, generals and admirals. The first flowers were from our best beloved author and the next from a Shubert chorus boy, and old ladies, buck dancers and girls "taking piano." They were all sincere and not one but was written by the person sending it. Not one that sounded like, "Miss Remington, don't forget condolence wire to the Greens, Mount Vernon." For instance, from Bruce McRae, "I am so very, very sorry." It makes my typewriter choke. It just seems that every one loved him.

IRENE FRANKLIN (GREEN).

November 22, 1922.

"BUNKER BEAN."

To the Dramatic Editor:

I read your article in the paper yesterday about "Bunker Bean."

I am ashamed that this book has been out of stock so long, but I am very happy to say that it is now in stock. I can tell you of eight book shops throughout the country that will have it, anyway—that is, the four Doubleday, Page & Company bookshops in New York and the four in outside cities—Toledo, Cleveland, St. Louis and Kansas City.

As an evidence of good faith I am taking pleasure in sending you a copy. I assure you it is a great satisfaction to be the publisher of Harry Leon Wilson's books.

RUSSELL DOUBLEDAY.

GARDEN CITY, L. I., November 20.

FROM CARL SANDBERG.

To the Dramatic Editor:

After looking at the Theatre Guild play, "R. U. R.," one has the feeling this is the first drama shown in this country touching the deeper human drifts of the time, which might be witnessed with enthusiasm by Nikolai Lenine and Samuel Gompers, by Morris Hillquit and William Z. Foster. It takes up efficiency problems with so sure a grasp and knowledge that it would attract Herbert J. Hoover. On the other hand a Henrik Van Loon would without any doubt feel that the story of mankind in the future is here told competently in terms of conjecture. That is, this drama runs as stormily as the latest movie storms while it is intellectually, in that way of speaking, a lot more important than Mr. Wells's "Outline of History," with as many surprises as the latest comprehensive work on goat and monkey gland experiments.

CARL SANDBERG.

November 16, 1922.

"THE LUCKY ONE."

To the Dramatic Editor:

I'm a Theater Guild regular. I pays my money, and—I takes what comes. I take "The Lucky One," because it represents the Guild policy exactly, namely, the policy of taking a sincere and "different" piece of work and presenting it to a choice public, sans commercial taint and popular acclaim.

You are quite right in damning the diction of the actors in this play. They deserve a producer of the old fashioned circus type, one will put the fear of God into them with a little straight but unprintable talk. The actors of the New York stage are chronic sufferers from speech laziness. I rarely go to the theater that I do not have my mother tongue grossly insulted, and the first act at the Garrick Theater Monday night quite capped the climax in down-at-heel and slipshod enunciation. I personally wanted to get those actors together and speak to them—shriek to them—in language of the lowest possible brow about their careless and illiterate manner of handling English speech. In this, the new direction seems to typify the modern tendency to put all the stress upon construction and ensemble and situation, and to give never a thought to the delivery of lines.

But you are quite wrong, pardon me, in damning the play. Here is a piece of work entirely different and apart from anything else Milne has done—a piece in which he has attempted a serious theme in a serious way. It stands in marked and worthy contrast to his other so much lighter work, that it seems (to some of us at least) that it was highly worth while undertaking. And seldom have I seen a play that builds so directly toward a last-act situation and climax. The play of diminishing consequence from first act to last we have always with us. But the play of increasing dramatic consequence is rare indeed. "The Lucky One" certainly builds in such a way that young dramatists would do well to take a few lessons from it for the great American dramas they are always about to write. And you must admit (though I think you didn't) that Mr. Simonson's sets are unusually fine.

O. O.

November 21, 1922.

A PROTEST.

To the Dramatic Editor:

I want to ask Mr. John Golden through your pages why he must have amateurs as understudies. After finding one possibility out of five hundred aspirants, as reported in THE HERALD, why not call a meeting of unemployed professionals? At least give them a chance at failing.

The public competition idea is not so attractive; but the prospect of an engagement is. Without impertinence, I, even as Hashimura Togo, ask to know.

Very truly yours,

MARY GREER.

November 22, 1922.

"THE ROMANTIC AGE."

To the Dramatic Editor:

While "The Romantic Age" is essentially gossamerlike and fanciful in its fabric, there seems to me to be a vein of thoughtful philosophy under the whole play that was missed by many of the spectators and critics. To my mind, Milne does not switch from fantasy to matter of fact in the last act, but to pull together the threads he has woven in the other two acts—the threads of his philosophy that romance is just as vivid to-day as ever it was, and that enchanted forests and the blue and gold of chivalry are only the symbols of the real romance that is in all our hearts and our every day lives if we have eyes to see it.

HENRY STILLMAN.

November 22, 1922.

The Rebellion of the Robots in "R. U. R.," from a drawing by Lucia R. Sayler. (The pronunciation of "robot" can be fixed by remembering the phrase "Don't robot in.")